

IN MEMORIAM
THOMAS NIELSON

1826-1910

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Died—at Heartsease, Florence, New Jersey,
on May 29th, 1910—Thomas Neilson, aged
84 years, “in the Communion of the Catholic
Church, in the confidence of a certain faith,
in the comfort of a reasonable religious and
holy hope, in favor with Thee, our God,
and in perfect charity with the world.”

A Memorial Service was held on the evening of October 27th, 1910, for the late Mr. Thomas Neilson, in S. Stephen's Church, Florence, New Jersey, of which he was the Founder, and its Warden from its beginning, nearly fifty-one years ago.

The Rev. Edward Ritchie, Rector of S. James the Less, at one time Rector of this Parish, preached the sermon which follows.

The music was well rendered by part of the Choir of the Church of the Ascension, Philadelphia, and Mr. F. B. Neilson presided at the organ.

PROCESSIONAL HYMN 179—

"Hark the Sound of Holy Voices" *Dr. Dykes*

PSALM I *J. Barnby*

MAGNIFICAT IN F *Robert H. Neilson*

NUNC DIMITTIS IN D *J. D. Field*

ANTHEM—

"What are these that are arrayed in white robes?"
Dr. Stainer

HYMN 243—

"On the Resurrection Morning" *G. W. Warren*

ANTHEM—Psalm 15

"Lord, Who Shall Dwell in Thy Tabernacle?"
Troy Chant

RECESSIONAL HYMN 396—

"Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand" *Dr. Dykes*



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THE VISION OF THINGS UNSEEN

We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.—II Cor. IV : 18

IN MEMORIAM, THOMAS NEILSON

THE context of these words is plain, and it is most impressive. As the Apostle views the matter, the natural aspect of his trials is taken up into the spiritual; the earthly into the heavenly. Upon one side is the vision of distress and perplexity; on the other, that of peace and joy. Because of its eternal hopes and interests, his Apostolic life was glowing with glory, even when affliction was in its fullest reign.

The word which we render “look,” means rather a very careful consideration than a mere look, and this the Apostle in effect says is properly given to those things which are not naturally seen; and he presents the matter in a clear-cut antithesis, things unseen being set over against things seen, things eternal over against things temporal. The force of his spiritual philosophy goes to teach us that our lives would be unable to live the life of faith without the vision of eternity before them. From its great fields and oceans, the soul would be continually drawing the inspiration of its life. Of course I would not wish to imply that our Christian life is wholly solvable into unseen conditions, and lacks definite and outward form in the world’s life. The word “spiritual” in the Christian vocabulary does not mean “ideal” or “visionary”; its use presents no obstacle to a proper linking of

natural things with those which transcend nature, no obstacle to our finding in natural things a spiritual force and meaning, and in spiritual things the natural things of our truest life. Unseen and eternal things are set over against things seen and temporal, that the true meaning and mission of life may not be obscured.

Under the holy spell of these words of our text, it is my privilege to speak to you to-night of one whose own in the fullest sense, this parish was, and within these hallowed walls to recount somewhat of the story of his life and service as a worker in God's Church. In a most limited way only, can a memorial sermon enter into the domain of biography, or do justice to the details of a long life. Our work to-night is rather to consider those things which are of our common knowledge in the life of a good man, a devout Churchman, and an earnest conserver of the Church's interests.

Thomas Neilson was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad, May 26, 1826. His education was in part abroad, and in part in this country, in which the far greater part of his life was spent. It was a life lived amid a large circle of those who knew him well, a life known and read of all. It had about it that simple, substantial worth and that calm and quiet reserve which usually goes with strong personality. In his life there was the presence of a sincerity and reality which are a charm in any life. The Christian world is far from being made up of hypocrites, yet even among good people there is no small degree of difference in the matter of reality in the character. There are all kinds and grades of artificiality, even where there is no real disingenuousness; and the charm of naturalness is the possession of some lives in a very marked degree. We cannot, of course, be tolerant of that type of character

which sees nothing to find fault with, nothing to rebuke; but gentleness in the life is a great blessing both to others and to ourselves. Naturally and fittingly, it seems linked with sincerity.

We may seek to explain the presence of the life's spiritual power upon the lines of temperament and association, but in the true analysis of the matter they must be carried to a higher court and be made as the fruits of grace in this life, an open door through which, amidst much that is temporal, we see the eternal vision.

Because I feel that Mr. Neilson's was a good exponent of these virtues in the life, as manifested in its words and actions, that I speak of them to-night. There are as many here who have as good a right to speak of his courteous bearing as I, but no better right. It seemed to me to be, in his case, as it should be, the natural expression in the larger circle of social life of that which, in the household, does so much to make life real and dear. His hospitality did not bear upon it the mere surface polish of outward politeness, but was rather as the exercised stewardship of the good gifts of God. While it is His prerogative alone unto Whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid to review the life and order of the human heart, yet the evidence of things unseen is found in the character of those which are seen. The fruits of grace in the life are referable to one source only—in our weak humanity we cannot expect to find faultless and perfect lives, yet the treasure of holy and good example is that which in a Christian life is ever calling us higher.

It is not necessary, as it would seem almost gratuitous, for me to enter into the consideration of the honored and respected life of Mr. Neilson as man among men, citizen

among citizens, gentleman among gentlemen, but I must not pass by without fuller reference the story which his life, as a Churchman, summons up and writes upon the past. His faith in the Church of God was clear and definite. He belonged, I think, to that happy class of Churchmen whose number is, alas, too small, which is always hopeful, optimistic and brave. For myself I would wish always to be of this company. The lives of many good Churchmen seem to me to be wanting in these qualities to the great injury of their work and influence. Churchmen who are men and women ready to face disappointment and discouragement in a thousand worldly matters, and to accept it as the normal discipline of the spiritual life, often seem to lack the fibre of moral courage in regard to those matters which are of the King's Household. They forget that it is a household of faith, and that it is the King's Household. They forget at times that the Great Head of the Household, who bestows upon our lives the gifts of godliness, is able also to defend from all adversity. It is too bad that there should ever be a want of practical faith in this regard, where theoretical faith is so good. But it is, also, very good that it is often conspicuously otherwise; that there are those who are able to order earthly scenes by heavenly vision, and to regard not the things which are seen, but those which are not seen. It is part, no doubt, of God's plan to place the strong in faith and moral courage at those posts, where weaker and less hopeful souls would be crushed; for in all our wisdom, He is wiser than we; He does all well, and uses His instruments to work out His purposes according to the fitness which He supplies, and is ready to reveal all which is here dark in the land of shadowless glory.

Mr. Neilson's work, I need not tell you, was in the most important and intimate way linked with the Parish, within whose Parish Church we have been worshipping, and thanking God for the work He has permitted His servant to do for him. His association, with this Parish, and its life and work, through a long period of personal and official connection, is fuller and deeper than I can depict. . It was his parish. Here, from the very beginning, he was an enrolled communicant, though the force of residential circumstance at times required his absence from the services here held, yet S. Stephen's was his Church, as no other Church was. It was the parish to which he contributed of his time, his means and his continual care. It was the parish where four of his children were baptized; and at whose altar he so regularly received the Body and Blood of our Lord. I know by my personal experience as his former rector, how consistently regular he was at the services here held. He was not one of those who felt that attendance at one service on Sunday was a desirable minimum. And to his presence was added the attitude of a devout and interested worshipper. But the story of beginnings is always helpful and inspiring. When the work here was in its very infancy, Mr. Neilson was a caretaker of its interests in the fullest way. At the very outset he was licensed by Bishop Odenheimer as a lay leader in the autumn of 1859. By him, in this capacity, the services were rendered with the fullest degree of regularity and reverence. Nor was the good warden willing to deprive himself of the privilege of doing that which needed to be done in the outward care and ordering of God's house. He did not hesitate to perform the duties of sexton and bell-ringer as occasion might require. And as time went on, and the ministra-

tions of the Church fell more into the hands of a settled pastorate, the work and service of him who had done his part in nursing the beginning of life, did not cease, nor his interest flagg. As warden of the parish here, he has laid down his work, for the summons of death have come. Other hands and hearts must be called to take up the work of one who has been called to go up higher. The record of a good man's work in God's cause cannot be forgotten, and it is not amiss, I think, to open another page in this book of life which reveals, as fully as any other, the goodness of God, though it is seen in His chastening hand. The cup of sorrow was very fully pressed to his lips in the death of two loved ones, a loyal daughter and loyal son of God's Church, who were called (as we would have viewed it) too early from their work for God's Church on earth. I will not pause upon these sacred memories, except to say how sure I am that the trial was bravely borne, as a brave heart, strengthened by Divine grace, bears all its trials. It is one of God's ways (so He has told us) of showing His love to our lives, one way of helping true-hearted souls, to mount higher and gaze upon the things unseen and eternal. We, by bowing the head, as well as by bowing the knee, are bowing our hearts to Him, who alone can rightly demand our supreme loyalty, and who is in all His works most wonderful, in all His ways most just.

Dear parishioners of S. Stephen's, you have lost in Mr. Neilson, one whose work remains, and whose example will be green with the glow life among you still. Under your devout and loyal Rector, you have your work of going on with courage and devotion, pressing with your footsteps where the fathers have trod. You have before you to-night the example and stimulation of a

long and true life spent in God's cause. A long life with God is strong in its depth and length and breadth, as a short life with Him is strong in its incisive definiteness. Each, in its own way, and according to its own measure, must speak of the shortness of time, and the greatness of eternity. A S. Stephen's life and a S. John's have, in the last analysis, the same witness to bear to our Lord's cause, for each, in his own calling, lives for the unseen and the eternal. The young deacon goes forth, fresh from the anointing of Apostolic hands, to preach, to work miracles, and to seal his witness in an early martyr's death. The aged saint's life is the witness of a life ever dying to self and living to God. I can well believe it would have been a joy to our dear brother to have seen reared up in this parish a larger and more fully appointed structure than this House of Prayer, dear, as it is in its consecration, its many associations and its undying memories, but the joy of working in God's cause was not wanting, and the call to believe and love and have the Faith once for all delivered to the saints.

And, dear friends, as the Holy Festival of All Saints draws near, again we have impressed upon us, by word and example, the great lesson our souls need to learn, the lesson of spiritual repair and spiritual advance. Again the Beatitudes, sounding from the Holy Mountain, will invite our lives to the call to inherit a blessing. It will be our own fault if we do not receive a blessing. How much it means to be blessed of God. Higher than earth with all its arresting glories, higher than heaven with its angelic circuits, our souls are called, through the Church of God, to rest on Him who is high above all created life, and to have a part and portion in His throne and crown. There is, indeed, no miracle more wonderful

than the spiritual miracle of Sacramental grace, transforming the life, day by day, and fitting it for the beatific vision of God. To Him we commit our own lives and the lives of those, whom He has numbered with the holy band of the faithful departed. May He to them, grant a place of refreshment, light and peace.

Grant them, Lord, eternal rest :
Light and life at Thy behest,
With the spirits of the blessed.

It has been well said that the Church in inscribing her creed upon the circling seasons of the year selects the beautiful repose of autumn, when nature, glorious in death, arrays herself for her solemn consummation in most gorgeous apparel, her vesture bright with many colors, the harsh asperities of the landscape softened and mellowed in the hazy cloud, which, as it were, receives our departed out of sight—as the truest emblem which the world supplies of their estate who departed in the Lord in faith and charity rest from their labors.

God bring us all, in the pathway of the saints, who followed in the way of Christ, and through the example of all the true-hearted servants of God, to the city of the Angels, the city of our God and to the revealed vision of things seen here only by the eye of faith.

The record of a long life, linked as it was with the life and work of the Church, would be incomplete without the mention of that from which so much of its help and inspiration must have come, a long span of happily married life, filled with mutual sympathy and common hopes, and, as well with a common interest in the welfare of S. Stephen's. The record of one life in these particulars is the record of another, and while one has passed within the veil, the other is still serving in the outer courts of the temple.

E. R.

TRIBUTE

TO THE MEMORY OF THE LATE THOMAS NEILSON
FROM HIS FRIEND OF MORE THAN THIRTY
YEARS, THE REVEREND E. M. REILLY



God's saint now rests, his noble work is done—
For him the crown of victory is won;
Through life he found his joy, both night and day,
In lifting mortals fallen by the way—
All classes, great and lowly, owned him friend,
And in his praise their voices oft did blend.
Beloved, revered, a privilege indeed
To listen to his welcome, and God speed,
And though his voice no more delights our ears,
Along the pathway of the coming years,
His dear example, through the Saviour's love,
Shall guide us to yon blessed home above.

RESOLUTIONS

OF THE VESTRY OF S. STEPHEN'S CHURCH
FLORENCE, NEW JERSEY



WHEREAS, our all wise and loving Father has, in His infinite wisdom, called from the scenes and cares of this life, our Senior Warden, one who was well known in our community as an honorable, straight-forward citizen, and a constant and consistent worker in the affairs of S. Stephen's Church, in Florence, for which he has labored for half a century; therefore be it

Resolved, That in the death of our beloved co-worker, Thomas Neilson, S. Stephen's Church mourns the loss of one who had always had the interest of the Church at heart; the vestry will lose the valued aid and counsel of one whose advice has always tended to uplift and advance the work of this place and the town of Florence, one who has been a good citizen and a good man in the community;

Resolved, That these Resolutions be spread upon the minutes of S. Stephen's Church, and a copy be forwarded to the family.

SAMUEL E. HANGER, *Rector*
WILLIAM A. WEBER
CHARLES C. REEVES, JR.
GEORGE B. HOBBS
CHARLES B. GRAVENER
DAVID BAIRD, JR.

Florence, June, 1910

At a special meeting of the Board of Managers of the Elmira & Williamsport Railroad Company, action was taken upon the death of our dear friend.

The Chairman announced the death on the 29th of May, 1910, of Thomas Neilson, President of this Company, in the eighty-fifth year of his age.

Whereupon, on motion, the following minute was unanimously adopted:

Thomas Neilson was elected a Manager of this Company on the 6th of May, 1867, and appointed its Secretary on the 1st of May, 1878, which position he held until the 26th of May, 1881, when he was elected President. He had, therefore, been identified with the management of the Company for over forty-three years, and for more than twenty-nine years has been its Chief Executive.

Mr. Neilson was a man of modest and unassuming nature, and of high integrity and character. His intimate knowledge of the affairs of the Company made him a valuable officer, while his courteous and gentle manner endeared him to all with whom he came in contact.

In recording his death, the Board of Managers desire to place upon record their full appreciation of his long, faithful and efficient service, and their sorrow at the severance of the close personal relations which have existed for so long a time.

MURRAY GORGAS, Chairman

LOUIS P. GEIGER, Secretary

Philadelphia, July 28th

A FEW EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS OF FRIENDS

"He was a good man in every sense of the word, and in that you have consolation."

"I well remember with what deep interest and devotion he used to engage in the services of the Church. In these days of spiritual unrest, how well it would be, if the type of his life as Christian and Churchman could be indefinitely produced."

"Mr. Neilson has always held a high place in my regard ever since, as a tiny child, I used to hear his dignified reading of our sweet service in the dear little church at Florence."

"Well done, good and faithful servant, must be his Epitaph."

"Mr. Neilson was indeed one of the noblest men I have ever had the privilege of knowing—considerate, gracious, helpful to all."

"Your dear husband has made a noble battle for life these many years, and now God, has given him Eternal life in exchange for the few years of tarrying here. We should rejoice rather than weep that his sufferings are ended, and the peace of God is his. There are no tormenting fears or doubts, because his life was guarded and controlled by the commandments of God. This is an assurance that should dry your tears and make you truly thankful."

"It required only a few moments in Mr. Neilson's company to feel the influence of the sweetness of his spirit."

"He will live always in the nobleness of the work he did on earth."

"The noblest inheritance we can leave behind us is an example of a life honorably and usefully spent, and that is what he gave his children."

